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SUBJECT: DFM RYABKOV ON RUSSIA-U.S. RELATIONS - MEETING
WITH CODEL DELAHUNT

11. (SBU) Summary: In a December 6 meeting with Representatives Bill Delahunt and Dana Rohrabacher, Deputy Foreign Minister Ryabkov explained that while the GOR looked upon the advent of a new U.S. administration as an opportunity to improve bilateral ties, Moscow did not necessarily expect a sea change to occur in Washington. He agreed with the Representatives' observation that Russia needed to better present itself in Washington, but thought it unlikely that the GOR could lobby the Hill in the same manner as other countries. Ryabkov stressed that Russian foreign policy would continue to be based upon the "defense of national interests," and that the GOR would act pragmatically to strengthen ties with other countries. He hoped for deeper economic relations with the U.S., which would help "stabilize" the bilateral relationship, while noting that corruption limited Russia's political and economic development. Ryabkov agreed that civilian nuclear energy was a potential field for Russia-U.S. cooperation, which argued for passage of the 123 agreement. End summary.

An Opportunity for Improved Relations -----

12. (SBU) In a December 6 meeting, Deputy Foreign Minister Ryabkov told Representative Bill Delahunt (D, MA), Representative Dana Rohrabacher (R, CA), and the Ambassador, that the GOR "understood" that a new U.S. administration presented an opportunity for some level of change in bilateral relations, but Moscow did not expect an "overall review of policy toward Russia." Nonetheless, he explained that when meeting with American visitors, Russian officials urged them to be "as pragmatic as possible" in thinking about ways to move the relationship forward.

13. (SBU) Representatives Delahunt and Rohrabacher observed that Russia was poorly represented in Washington, where its Ambassador failed to meet with Members of Congress in order to present the Russian perspective on Georgia. Ryabkov agreed that the GOR "definitely has a problem" in this regard, which he attributed to differences between Russian and American political culture. In the case of the Georgian crisis, he thought it "inconceivable" that in the midst of the "emotional" events of August, Moscow could dispatch instructions to a Washington lobbyist the way that Tbilisi appeared to have done.

14. (SBU) Ryabkov appreciated Representative Rohrabacher's comment that the U.S. bore much of the blame for the poor state of bilateral ties, and had improperly accused Russia of causing the Georgian crisis. Ryabkov said that that while it was impossible for Russia and the U.S. to avoid "complications" in their relationship stemming from the situation in the Caucasus, it was now "irrelevant to figure out who was right and who was wrong" and more important to "move forward."

Russia Will Defend its Interests -----

15. (SBU) Ryabkov stressed that no matter where bilateral relations were headed, the U.S. needed to understand that Russian foreign policy would continue to be based upon the "defense of national interests that are clearly defined and around which there is a national consensus." Furthermore, Russia would be "pragmatic" in taking advantage of opportunities to advance these interests. He offered the example of Medvedev traveling to Latin America to deepen ties with the region during a rocky period in Russia-U.S. relations.

Economic Ties Can Improve

16. (SBU) Ryabkov expressed appreciation for the efforts of the Bush Administration and Congress to improve Russia-U.S. relations where possible. He took note of the "sea of difference" in the atmosphere Russian and American businesses now find compared to even five years previous, but thought there was still "a way to go" to reach the level of private sector connectivity Russia and Europe currently enjoy. A degree of "interdependence" would be healthy for the Russia-U.S. relationship, according to Ryabkov, who thought that closer economic ties would have a "stabilizing impact."

17. (SBU) Ryabkov agreed with Representative Delahunt's observation that corruption hindered Russia's political and economic development, and lamented that Russia "will not be a modern society" unless it can bring this problem under control.

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Nuclear Cooperation

18. (SBU) Ryabkov expressed interest in Representative Rohrabacher's vision of Russia and the U.S. cooperating on the provision of nuclear power to developing countries that could not meet their energy needs. He noted that the U.S. and Russia were on the same page in the Nuclear Suppliers Group when it came to lifting prohibitions on India, but added that, for the time being, the U.S. and Russia were likely to remain competitors in selling nuclear power plants to other countries. When the Ambassador commented that it was necessary for Congress to pass the U.S.-Russia 123 Agreement, Ryabkov said that while the GOR understood the political reason behind the Bush Administration's decision to withdraw the agreement from Congress, eventual passage of 123 was "crucial."

19. (U) The delegation has not cleared this cable.